

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Stefan Keller, and I live in Hartford. I stand in strong support of SB284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. Access to quality and affordable healthcare should be available to everyone and this bill helps us get closer to that goal. It would expand access to HUSKY for all children up to 18 regardless of immigration status. This is an important step on the way to everyone having access to quality, affordable health insurance including parents, adults, and immigrants of any age.

This past year, I needed to receive the rabies vaccine due to an encounter with a bat. This involved me going to the emergency room on 4 occasions and receiving the 4 dose rabies vaccine regimen. After I finished I received the hospital bill and was shocked to see that, had I not had health insurance, getting the shots would have cost me over \$10,000. Rabies is a disease that is 100% fatal. How could someone without health insurance afford to receive this vital care should they need it? What kinds of decisions would I have had to make if I did not have insurance? Would I maybe have risked not going to the hospital and hope I did not have rabies?

These are the types of questions that immigrant families are left to answer everyday as they make decisions about the types of care they are able to afford and access. I currently work for Make the Road CT and am connected to other immigrant led organizations including Hartford Deportation Defense and CT Students for a Dream. In my 8 years of being involved I have heard countless stories. The immigrant student that could not afford dental care and was going to college just so they could get dental insurance, the person who was told to go back to their country to get urgent care they needed but could not afford, the person who lost parts of their feet and vision due to lack of access to insulin and medication related to diabetes. In a country that has so many health resources and in the state with some of the best hospitals in the country, these types of stories should not have to be told. And yet, this is our current reality.

We hear a lot about “getting back to normal” now that we seem to finally be turning the corner on covid. However, normal did not work before for our immigrant community when it comes to healthcare. We have the opportunity to go above and beyond what the inadequate normal looked like before and provide a real recovery for the immigrant community of our state. Providing access to HUSKY Health Insurance would allow immigrant families to make healthcare decisions based on what is best for their health instead of what is best for their pocketbook.

Our neighbors in Massachusetts and New York have already passed similar policies and it is time for us to join them. I ask the committee to support S.B. 284 and advocate for its passage amongst your colleagues as the bill moves on. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all immigrants regardless of age as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stefan Keller
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